



Today's Masterpiece: Garry Winogrand, [New York](#), 1963. Gelatin silver print. Museum of Photographic Arts at The San Diego Museum of Art; Gift of Carl W. Melcher, M.1985.039.007.



Welcome back to **Masterpiece Minute on Virtual SDMA**. I'm your host, **Kara Felt**, and I'm the Lawrence S. Friedman Curator of Photography at The San Diego Museum of Art.

Today I am spotlighting a photograph titled *New York*, which shows a child, man, and woman leaning over a rail to peer down at a walrus who in turn stares into Winogrand's lens. Rounding their backs as they lower their bodies for a better view, the trio mirrors the slope of the walrus's form, just as their tilt toward the upper righthand corner echoes the mammal's cocked head. In this network of looking, Winogrand captures humans observing an animal observing the photographer. On either side of the guardrail dividing the picture, Winogrand represents a striking and amusing parallel between the human and animal worlds where people look *at* and also *like* the animals in captivity.

In the early 1960s, Winogrand frequented New York City's zoos and the aquarium at Coney Island with his camera and two young children. Winogrand was born in the Bronx and lived in New York until 1971, establishing a reputation as a photographer of the street and public sphere. He used a lightweight camera with fast film so he could act quickly to capture the fleeting constellations of figures around him. This photograph formed part of a series that was published in 1969 as Winogrand's first book, *The Animals*, with an accompanying solo show at New York's Museum of Modern Art. The book came on the heels of Winogrand's rise to fame when he was one of three American photographers featured in a highly influential MoMA exhibition called *New Documents* in 1967. That show argued that Winogrand, Lee Friedlander, and Diane Arbus typified the spirit of their generation, which the curator John Szarkowski characterized as "not to reform life but to know it, not to persuade but to understand." Unlike earlier documentary photographers who often tried to affect social change, these young photographers redefined documentary as more personal and open-ended.

Like his contemporaries, Winogrand looked deeply at American life, and while his pictures are frequently humorous, they reflect critical currents in the national psyche. Notice, for example, how prominently the barrier features in this photograph of a walrus. Winogrand structures his picture around the on-and-on of the railing's bars, which find visual reinforcement in a second barrier, the multitude of wooden planks in the fence behind. With the noted similarities on both sides, the photograph breaks down and questions the distinction between the human and animal realms, asserting the primitive instincts inside us all. At the same time, through fixating on enclosures,



the zoo becomes a metaphor for other entrapments in the 1960s, from Winogrand's separation (and eventual divorce) from his first wife while producing these pictures, to people being caged in cities like his hometown of New York, and even more broadly to a time of divisions based on gender and race. As in the best of Winogrand's work, a photograph of a public spectacle hovers between light-hearted and symbolic.

Thank you for listening. This has been **Dr. Kara Felt** with **Masterpiece Minute on Virtual SDMA**.



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